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Session Watch: Bill Filing for the 85th Session Ends

By Senator Carlos Uresti

The Legislature has passed the 60th day of the legislative session, which means bills that are not classified as emergency items can be heard and voted by the Senate from this point forward. Your definition of an emergency item may not be the same as your neighbor, but ultimately it's the Governor that has the final say on what is an emergency item. When an issue is important to your constituency, it's always an emergency item, and I look forward to debating and voting on a number of important bills that have been filed to benefit our children, our families, and our state.

My office, like many others is now finished filing legislation. Friday, March 10th was the deadline to file Senate bills. Around the Capitol, there are lobbyists, advocates, and citizens rushing around the legislature, trying to ensure their priority bills are filed before the deadline. Many offices place signs on their office door indicating they are no longer filing additional bills, usually with a comedic twist such as "Gone Fishin'". While my office does not have a sign, and will happily greet all visitors, we are sure to place extreme scrutiny on bills that show up on the final day of filing to make sure they benefit District 19.

Now the sprint begins. In theory, Senate bills must pass to the House of Representatives by the 130th day of session, or May 19th to have a mathematical chance of becoming law. In reality, however, a Senate bill will need to pass to the House by the beginning of May to avoid any last minute procedural delays.

The attorneys who draft legislation have been busy this session. The legislature has filed 6,654 bills this session, nearly six percent more than this point last session. Needless to say, our committee hearing days are about to turn into nights, with the occasional early morning, to sort through the bills and to determine what is best for Texas.

One bill of great importance to me is Senate Bill 1463. I filed this bi-partisan bill along with Senators Donna Campbell and Jose Menendez, and Representatives Barbara Gervin-Hawkins and Tomas Uresti to enhance penalties for individuals convicted of continuous abuse of a child, the elderly or a disabled person. The "Chipping Drive Case" of child abuse in San Antonio brought to light the weaknesses in our current law when charging a person who continuously abuses a child, causing repeated bodily injury, but not serious bodily injury. One word can make all the difference, and we must ensure serial abusers are taken off the street!

Not all legislation seeks to close a loophole, or improve the performance of a state program or benefit. The legislature also takes up many issues that are light-hearted, yet important culturally

to us as Texans. For example, some of my colleagues have filed bills to designate a medal to military who serve along our Southern Border, designating the Bowie as the official knife of Texas, a bill to designate the 1847 Colt Walker pistol as the official handgun of Texas, and another to designate the cannon as the official state gun.

As always, I hope you will engage my office when a bill of importance to you comes before the Senate so I can best represent District 19. Semper Fi!

Session Watch is a bi-weekly column by State Senator Carlos Uresti to provide a first-hand account of the ongoing 85th Legislative Session.

Sen. Uresti represents Senate District 19, which covers more than 35,000 square miles and contains all or part of 17 counties, two international ports of entry, eleven state parks, 51 school districts, 2700 miles of highways, and more than 23,000 producing oil and gas wells in both the Eagle Ford Shale and Permian Basin. The district is larger than 12 states and 82 Nations, and contains over one third of the Texas-Mexico border. Sen. Uresti is proud to serve on the Finance, Education, and Veteran Affairs & Border Security Committees and as Vice Chair of the Health & Human Services Committee.